

## LEAVITT FLYING HIGH ON TAXPAYERS' DIME

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Use of Luxury Jet Raises Questions of Abuse

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WASHINGTON, D.C. &ndash; Senior Ways and Means Committee Democrats Pete Stark (D-CA, 13) and John Lewis (D-GA, 5) today questioned Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Mike Leavitt's use of a costly Centers for Disease Control (CDC) jet for public relations stops to promote the Bush prescription drug program.

"This plane is supposed to help the CDC respond to emergencies. Secretary Leavitt has abused his authority to use this plane by flying to press conferences and sticking taxpayers with the bill," cautioned Representative Pete Stark. "While Secretary Leavitt has a job to do, he must be accountable to taxpayers who trust him to use their money responsibly. At a staggering cost of \$3,000 per flight hour, Leavitt's jet-setting in the CDC plane has been far more expensive than any first class ticket would have been. These expenditures call into question his judgment and his use of the public trust."

The CDC leases the jet through Phoenix Air Group in Cartersville, Georgia for a price of \$252,000 per month, with additional fees of \$3,000 per flight hour for its use. As stipulated in the attached legislation, Congress authorized the CDC and HHS to use the plane during "times of emergencies" and "in response to significant events." Yet Secretary Leavitt has already taken 19 trips on the CDC plane. According to CDC and HHS officials, taxpayers have already spent over \$2.1 million for the use of the airplane in 2006.

"I think it is a shame and a disgrace," said Representative John Lewis, "that a Member of the President's cabinet would use resources placed in the public trust, resources intended to rush emergency disaster relief personnel to Americans who are seriously ill, for a series of public relations junkets. Apparently, there were instances that the CDC could

have used this jet for justifiable medical emergencies, while Mr. Leavitt had the plane engaged. This is an irresponsible use of taxpayer dollars."

Conference report on FY 2006 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Act (H.R. 3010, H.Rept. 109-337; PL 109-149)

SEC. 227. In addition to any other amounts available for such travel, and notwithstanding any other provision of law, amounts available from this or any other appropriation for the purchase, hire, maintenance, or operation of aircraft by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shall be available for travel by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and employees of the Department of Health and Human Services accompanying the Secretary or the Director during such travel.

From the Statement of Managers:

#### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES TRAVEL

The conference agreement includes a new provision granting authority to the Secretary to use, at his discretion, charter aircraft under contract with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Secretary has significant operational responsibilities in times of emergencies and in the days following such emergencies. The Department is the primary agency for directing public health and medical services in response to significant events. Due to the unpredictable nature of such events, the conferees believe the Secretary must be in a posture to respond and communicate as an event is unfolding. Yet, existing travel limitations on the Secretary make this extremely difficult. The availability of CDC's charter aircraft will allow the Secretary to immediately return to Washington or rapidly move to another location as the situation dictates, at the same time being able to securely communicate with and direct the Department.

The conference agreement also extends this authority to the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The conferees understand that, due to existing restrictions, the Director on a number of occasions has not been able to accompany employees of the Agency responding to public health emergencies.

The conferees expect the Secretary and the Director of CDC to exercise this authority in an economical and judicious manner. The conferees request that the Secretary report to the Committees on Appropriations of the House and Senate regarding the use of this authority in the annual justification of estimates for the Appropriations Committees and at the end of the third quarter of each fiscal year.